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Blatchford, Robert

What is this socialism?

London

[1910?]

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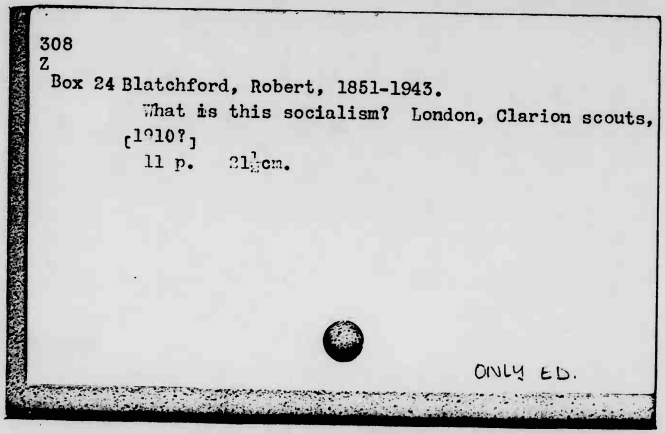

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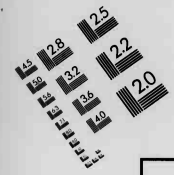
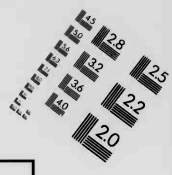
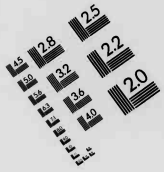
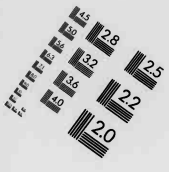

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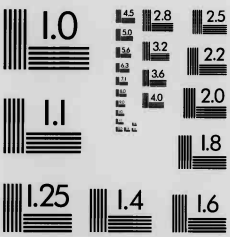

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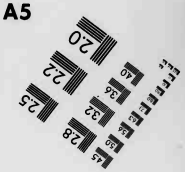
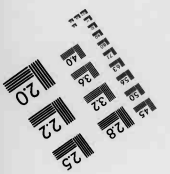
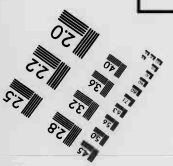
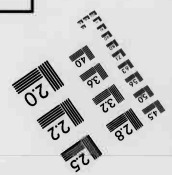

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WH IS THIS SOCIALISM

BY

ROBERT BLATCHFORD

ISSUED BY THE LONDON CLARION SC

The London Clarion Scouts.

—*—

The London Clarion Scouts was formed on March 17, 1906, for the purposes of Socialist Propaganda generally, and for "scouting" work in particular.

The objectives outlined at its inception were as follows:

1. To act as pioneers by opening up new districts for Socialism.
2. To hold preparatory meetings in each district before the visits of the Clarion Van.
3. To train speakers, literature sellers, etc.
4. To organise Lectures, Concerts, Dances, Reunions, etc.
5. To co-operate with existing Socialist bodies for the furtherance of Socialism.

The London Clarion Scouts is essentially a fighting organisation, and forms the light cavalry of the Socialist movement in London. Amongst its ranks are to be found members of the Independent Labour Party, Social Democratic Federation, Fabian Society, etc., together with a large number of unattached Socialists. The membership approximates to three hundred, and an appeal is made to all active Socialists to join, whether attached or unattached. To the latter a special invitation is extended. Subscription, 1s. for each six months, should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer, H. J. Pearce, 47, Deronda Road, Herne Hill, S.E.

The Conservative or Liberal reader who is convinced by the arguments for Socialism adduced in this pamphlet, and who is filled with the "enthusiasm for humanity," which charactises the supporters of the Socialist movement, will be cordially welcomed by the London Clarion Scouts.

Hon. Secretary:

CHARLES N. L. SHAW.

Elm Villa, Derby Road,
South Woodford

WHAT IS THIS SOCIALISM?

By ROBERT BLATCHFORD

THIS is not a defence of Socialism: it is an explanation of Socialism.

There is not room in this pamphlet to prove that Socialism is just and practical and desirable. The object, here, is to explain what Socialism is—and is not.

A great deal of the hostility to Socialism arises from misunderstanding as to what Socialism is.

This misunderstanding is due to the misrepresentations of Socialism by its opponents.

What Socialism Is Not.

Socialism is not a scheme for seizing the property of the rich, and sharing it out amongst the poor.

Plans for a national "dividing up" are not Socialism: they are nonsense. "Dividing up" means individual ownership: Socialism means collective ownership.

Thus, the municipal trams are collectively owned by the citizens. No one but a lunatic would suggest that the trams and the tramlines should be "divided up" amongst the people.

The citizens of Manchester, when they decided to run municipal trams, did not take the trams by force from the private companies and "divide them up" amongst the ratepayers.

INTENTIONAL SECOND EXPOSURE

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The citizens of Manchester, when they decided to run municipal trams, did not take the trams by force from the private companies and "divide them up" amongst the ratepayers.

They built new trams, acquired and extended the tramlines, and made the whole system the property of the whole city. The trams and tramlines are collectively owned.

To "divide up" the tramway system would be anti-Socialism. Socialism is the opposite of "dividing-up." Socialism is collective ownership. That the people of England should collectively own England and all that is in England, as the citizens of Manchester collectively own the trams; that is Socialism.

Socialism does not "threaten the sanctity of the home." Socialism has no more to do with the marriage laws than Toryism has. It has no more to say to free love than it has to say to vegetarianism. If a Socialist happens to be a total abstainer, a Methodist, or an Agnostic, it is because he happens to believe in temperance, in Methodism, or in Agnosticism; and not because he is a Socialist.

A Socialist is not one who advocates free love, or Roman Catholicism, or Tariff Reform, or secular education: a Socialist is one who advocates the collective ownership of land and wealth.

Those who wish to understand Socialism will be wise to study Socialist books and papers. One does not expect a true and fair account of any theory or cause from its enemies. The man who takes his ideas of Trade Unionism from the Free Labour League, his ideas of Liberalism from the Tory papers, his ideas of South African affairs—or of any other affairs—from the Yellow Press, will be misled into all manner of absurdities and errors.

The statements of party politicians and party newspapers on most controversial subjects are prejudiced and inaccurate; but there is no subject upon which the professional misleaders of the people are so untrustworthy and so disingenuous as they are upon the subject of Socialism.

Socialism is not a plan to despoil the rich; it is a plan to stop the rich from despoiling the poor. Socialism is not a thief; it is a policeman.

What Socialism Is.

Socialism is a system of national co-operation. It is based upon the principle of co-operation, as opposed to the principle of competition. It is based upon the principle of collectivism

as opposed to the principle of individualism. It is union as against disunion, order as against anarchy. It means each for all and all for each, as against the present cruel and wasteful system of "Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

"Webster's Dictionary" describes Socialism as:

> A theory of society which advocates a more precise, orderly, and harmonious arrangement of the social relations of mankind than that which has hitherto prevailed.

The "Century Dictionary" describes Socialism as:

> Any theory or system of social organisation which would abolish entirely, or in great part, the individual effort and competition on which modern society rests, and substitute co-operation, would introduce a more perfect and equal distribution of the products of labour, and would make land and capital, as the instruments of production, the joint possession of the members of the community.

The "Standard Dictionary" describes Socialism as:

> A theory of civil polity that aims to secure the reconstruction of society, increase of wealth, and a more equal distribution of the products of labour through the public collective ownership of land and capital (as distinguished from property) and the public collective management of all industries.

"Worcester's Dictionary" describes Socialism as:

> The science of reconstructing society on an entirely new basis, by substituting the principles of association for that of competition in every branch of human industry.

The "Encyclopædia Britannica" says:

> The ethics of Socialism are identical with the ethics of Christianity.

Three of the most popular and widely-circulated English books on Socialism are "The Fabian Essays," "Merrie England," and "Britain for the British." The "Fabian Essays" say:

> Socialism is the common holding of the means of production and exchange, *and the holding of them for the equal benefit of all.*

" Merrie England " says :

> Socialists do not propose by a single Act of Parliament, nor by a sudden revolution, to put all men on an equality, and compel them to remain so. Socialism is not a wild dream of a happy land, where the apples will drop off the trees into our open mouths, the fish come out of the rivers and fry themselves for dinner, and the looms turn out ready-made suits of velvet with golden buttons, without the trouble of coaling the engine. Neither is it a dream of a nation of stained-glass angels, who always love their neighbours better than themselves, and who never need to work unless they wish.
>
> Socialism is a scientific scheme of national organisation, entirely wise, just, and practical. It is a kind of national co-operation. Its programme consists, essentially, of one demand, that the land, and all other instruments of production and exchange shall be the common property of the nation, and shall be used and managed by the nation for the nation.

" Britain for the British " says :

> Here, in plain words, is the *principle*, or root idea, on which all Socialists agree :
>
> That the country, and all the machinery of production in the country, shall belong to the whole people (the nation), and shall be used *by* the people, *for* the people. This is the principle of collective or national ownership, and co-operative or national use and control.
>
> Socialism may be summed up in one line, in four words, as really meaning " Britain for the British."

The above definitions of Socialism are taken from authoritative sources. Mr. George Bernard Shaw, Mr. Sidney Olivier (present Governor of Jamaica), Mr. Hubert Bland, and the Editor of the " Clarion " may be fairly acknowledged to know more about Socialism than the writers on the " Referee " and the " Daily Mail."

Socialism means Britain for the British.

At present Britain does not belong to the British : it belongs to a few of the British, who employ the bulk of the population as servants or as workers.

It is because Britain does not belong to the British that a few are very rich and the many are very poor.

It is because Britain does not belong to the British that we find amongst the *owning* class a state of useless luxury and pernicious idleness, and amongst the *working* classes a state of drudging toil, of wearing poverty and anxious care.

This state of affairs is contrary to Christianity, is contrary to justice, and contrary to reason. It is bad for the rich, it is bad for the poor; it is against the best interests of the British nation and the human race.

At present most of the land in Britain belongs to a few landlords, who let it to farmers or builders, and charge rent for it.

Socialists claim that all land should belong to *all* the British people : to the nation.

At present the railways belong to railway companies, who carry goods and passengers, and charge rates and fares, to make profit.

Socialists claim that all railways, rivers, roads, tramways, and bridges should belong to the whole people, and should be managed by the people for the people.

At present all mills, mines, breweries, ships, and shops belong to rich men, or to private companies, who sell their goods for profit.

Socialists claim that *all* the instruments for the production of wealth, or of commodities, should belong to *all* the people, and should be used by the people for the people.

To-day the nation owns *some* things; under Socialism the nation would own *all* things.

To-day the nation owns the ships of the navy, the forts, arsenals, public buildings, Government factories, and some other things.

To-day the Government, *for the nation*, manages the post office and telegraphs, makes some of the clothes and food and arms for the army and navy, builds some of the warships, and oversees the Church, the prisons, and the schools.

Socialists want the nation to own *all* the buildings, factories, lands, rivers, ships, schools, machines, and goods, and to manage *all* their business and work, and to buy and sell and make and use *all* goods for themselves.

To-day some cities (as Manchester and Glasgow) make gas, and supply gas and water to the citizens. Some cities let their citizens buy their gas and water from gas and water companies

Socialists want *all* the gas and water to be supplied to the people by their own officials, as in Glasgow and Manchester.

Under *Socialism* all the work of the nation would be

organised—that is to say, it would be "ordered," or "arranged," so that no one need be out of work, and so that no useless work need be done, and so that no work need be done twice where once would serve.

At present the work is *not* organised, except in the post office and in the various works of the Corporations.

Let us take a look at the state of things in England to-day.

To-day the industries of England are not ordered nor arranged, but are left to be disordered by chance and by the ups and downs of trade.

So we have at one and the same time, and in one and the same trade, and, often enough, in one and the same town, some men working overtime and other men out of work.

We have at one time the cotton mills making more goods than they can sell, and at another time we have them unable to fulfil their orders.

We have in one street a dozen small shops all selling the same kind of goods, and so spending in rent, in fittings, in wages of servants, and other ways, about four times as much as would be spent if all the work were done in one big shop.

We have one contractor sending men and tools and bricks and wood from North London to build a house in South London, and another contractor in South London going to the same trouble and expense to build a house in North London.

We have in England thousands of acres of good land lying idle because it does not *pay* to till it, and at the same time we have thousands of labourers out of work who would be only too glad to till it.

So in one part of a city you may see hundreds of houses standing empty, and in another part of the same city you may see hard-working people living three and four families in a small cottage.

Then, under competition, where there are many firms in the same trade, and where each firm wants to get as much trade as it can, a great deal of money is spent by these firms in trying to get the trade from each other.

Thus all the cost of advertisements, of travellers' wages, and a lot of cost of bookkeeping, arise from the fact that there are many firms all trying to snatch the trade from each other.

Non-Socialists claim that this clumsy and costly way of going to work is really the best way there is. They say that competition gets the work done by the best men and at the lowest rate.

Perhaps some of them believe this; but it is not true. The mistake is caused by the fact that *competition* is better than *monopoly*.

That is to say, if there is only one tram company in a town the fares will be higher than if there are two; because when there are two one tries to undersell the other.

But take a town where there are two tram companies undercutting and working against each other, and hand the trams over to the Corporation, and you will find that the work is done better, is done cheaper, and the men are better paid than under competition.

This is because the Corporation is at less cost, has less waste, and does not want *profits*.

Under Socialism all the work of the nation would be managed *by* the nation *for* the nation.

That is Socialism. It is really an extension of the system of municipal ownership.

Anti-Socialists try to make the people believe that municipal or national ownership is not expedient: does not *pay*. This is quite untrue; but the evidence does not come within the scope of this pamphlet.

Those who wish to know the truth about municipal ownership will do well to read "Mind Your Own Business," by R. B. Suthers; published by The Clarion Press, price sixpence.

But municipal ownership of gas, or trams, or water, is not Socialism. It is only a partial adaption of Socialist theory to municipal practice. Socialism means Britain for the British: it means that the whole people shall own the whole country, and shall manage it for the benefit of *all*.

The present system is based upon competition. It is based upon the inhuman and cynical idea that a system is a good system if it enables the few strong, or clever, or unscrupulous, to gain wealth and luxury and power, without regard to the ignorance, the poverty, or the suffering of the toiling unsuccessful millions.

Socialism begins at the other end. Socialism says that a system is a bad system which results in useless wealth, in idleness, and in vanity for a few, and in poverty, ignorance, disease, anxiety, and premature death—or worse than death—for millions.

Socialism would begin by making sure that there should not be a single untaught, unloved, hungry child in the kingdom; that there should be no such thing as poverty, lack of employ-

ment, ignorance, preventable disease, starvation, and despair, within the borders of the British Islands.

Socialism would provide work, education, food, clothing, shelter, clean and pure air and water for *all*.

Our present laws are designed to protect the idle and selfish few against the industrious many. Socialism would defend the industrious many from the rapacious few.

In Britain at present about ten millions of the population exist always on the borders of starvation. About twenty millions are poor.

In London 1,292,737 persons, or 37.8 per cent. of the whole population, get less than a guinea a week *per family*.

The number of persons in receipt of poor-law relief on any one day in the British Islands is over 1,000,000; but 2,360,000 persons receive poor-law relief during one year, or one in eleven of the whole manual labouring class.

In England and Wales alone 72,000 persons die each year in workhouse hospitals, infirmaries, or asylums.

In London alone there are 99,830 persons in workhouses, hospitals, prisons, or industrial schools.

In London one person out of every four will die in a workhouse, hospital, or lunatic asylum.

Socialism would abolish all that misery and suffering and wrong.

Non-Socialists assert with the utmost confidence that Socialism is impossible. Let us consider this statement in a practical way.

We are told that Socialism is impossible. That means that the people have not the ability to manage their own affairs, and must, perforce, give nearly all the wealth they produce to the superior persons who at present are kind enough to own, to govern and to manage Britain for the British.

A bold statement! The people *cannot* manage their own business: it is *impossible*. They cannot farm the land, and build the factories, and weave the cloth, and feed and clothe and house themselves; they are not able to do it. They must have landlords and masters to do it for them.

But the joke is that these landlords and masters do *not* do it for the people. The people do it for the landlords and masters; and the latter gentlemen make the people pay them for allowing the people to work.

But the people can only produce wealth under supervision;

they must have superior persons to direct them. So the non-Socialist declares.

Another bold assertion, which is not true. For nearly all those things which the non-Socialists tells us are impossible *are being done*. Nearly all these matters of management, of which the people are said to be incapable, are being accomplished by the people *now*.

For if the nation can build warships, why can they not build cargo ships? If they can make rifles, why not sewing machines or ploughs? If they can build forts, why not houses? If they can make policemen's boots and soldiers' coats, why not make ladies' hats and mechanics' trousers? If they can pickle beef for the navy, why should they not make jam for the household? If they can run a railway across the African desert, why should they not run one from London to York?

Look at the Co-operative Societies. They own and run cargo ships. They import and export goods. They make boots and foods. They build their own shops and factories. They buy and sell vast quantities of useful things.

Well, these places were started by working men, and are owned by working men.

Look at the post office. If the nation can carry its own letters, why not its own coals? It it can manage its telegraphs, why not its railways, its trams, its cabs, its factories?

Look at the London County Council and the Glasgow and Manchester Corporations. If these bodies of public servants can build dwelling-houses, make roads, tunnels, and sewers, carry water from Thirlmere to Manchester, manage the Ship Canal, make and supply gas, own and work tramways, and take charge of art galleries, baths, wash-houses, and technical schools, what is there that landlords or masters do, or get done, which the cities and towns cannot do better and more cheaply for themselves?

What sense is there in pretending that the colliers could not get coal unless they paid rent to a lord, or that the railways could not carry coal unless they paid dividends to a company, or that the weaver could not make shirtings, nor the milliners bonnets, nor the cutlers blades, just as well for the nation as for Mr. Bounderby or my Lord Tomnoddy?

Municipalities own and manage waterworks, gasworks, tramways, telephones, electric lighting, markets, baths, piers, docks, parks, farms, dwelling-houses, abattoirs, cemeteries, crematoriums, libraries, schools, art galleries, hotels, dairies, colleges,

and technical schools. Many of the Municipalities also provide concerts, open-air music, science classes, and lectures; and quite recently the Alexandra Palace has been municipalised, and is now being successfully run by the people and for the people.

How, then, can *Socialism* be called impossible? As a matter of fact, *Socialism* is only a method of extending State management, as in the Post Office, and Municipal management, as in the cases above named, until State and Municipal management become universal all through the kingdom.

Where is the impossibility of that? If a Corporation can manage trams, gas, and water, why can it not manage bread, milk, meat, and beer supplies?

If Bradford can manage one hotel, why not more than one? If Bradford can manage more than one hotel, why cannot London, Glasgow, Leeds, and Portsmouth do the same?

If the German, Austrian, French, Italian, Belgium, and other Governments can manage the railway systems of their countries, why cannot the British Government manage theirs?

If the Government can manage a fleet of war vessels, why not fleets of liners and traders? If the Government can manage post and telegraph services, why not telephones and coalmines?

The answer to all these questions is that the Government and the Municipalities have proved that they can manage vast and intricate businesses, and can manage them more cheaply, more efficiently, and more to the advantage and satisfaction of the public than the same class of business has ever been managed by private firms.

How can it be maintained, then, that *Socialism* is impossible?

How does the non-Socialist system work? Here is the evidence of the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain:

> The ordinary conditions of life among a large proportion of the population are such that common decency is absolutely impossible; and all this goes on in sight of the mansions of the rich, where undoubtedly there are people who would gladly remedy it if they could. It goes on in presence of wasteful extravagance and luxury, which bring but little pleasure to those who indulge in them; and private charity is powerless, religious organisations can do nothing, to remedy the evils which are so deep-seated in our social system.

Here is the evidence of the late Lord Salisbury:

> They looked around them and saw a *growing* mass of *poverty* and *want of employment*, and of course the one object which every statesman who loved his country should desire to attain, was that there might be the largest amount of profitable employment for the mass of the people.
>
> He did not say that he had any patent or certain remedy for *the terrible evils which beset us on all sides*, but he did say that it was time they left off mending the constitution of Parliament, and that they turned all the wisdom and energy Parliament could combine together in order to remedy the *sufferings* under which so *many* of their countrymen laboured.

There is a pretty confession for the Prime Minister of England to make. It is a confession that under the present system of class rule and competition—the Individualist system—there is a *growing* mass of poverty, for which our rulers have no remedy.

And these persons have the effrontery to declare that Socialism is impossible!

For full and convincing answers to the objections brought against Socialism, and for a more complete statement of the aims, the policy, and the ideals of Socialists, the reader is referred to:

"The Fabian Essays": the Fabian Society; price 1s.
"Britain for the British": Clarion Press; price 3d.
"News from Nowhere," by William Morris: Reeves and Turner; price 1s.
"The Sorcery Shop": Clarion Press; price 2s. 6d.

Socialism is a religion of humanity. Socialism is the only hope of the race. Socialism is the remedy—the only remedy—which Lord Salisbury could not find.

Reader, if you are shrewd and strong and skilful, think a little and work a little for the millions of your own class who are ignorant and weak and friendless. If you have a wife and children whom you love, remember the many poor and wretched women and children who are robbed of love, of leisure, of sunshine and sweet air, of knowledge and of hope, in the pent and dismal districts of our big misgoverned towns. If you as a

Briton are proud of your country and your race, if you as a man have any pride of manhood, or as a worker have any pride of class, come over to us and help in the just and wise policy of winning Britain for the British, manhood for *all* men, womanhood for *all* women, and love to-day and hope to-morrow for the children.

That it may please thee to succour, help, and comfort *all* that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation.

That it may please thee to defend, and provide for, the fatherless children, and widows, and *all* that are desolate and oppressed.

That it may please thee to have mercy upon *all* men.

If we would realise that prayer, we must turn to *Socialism;* if we would win defence for the fatherless children and the widows, succour, help, and comfort for *all* that are in danger, necessity, or tribulation, and mercy for *all* men, we must turn to Socialism: the only remedy: the only hope.

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